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"ALL PERSONNEL: TANGO IS EXITING THE NORTH SIDE. OPEN FIRE!"
"SIR...I CAN'T. MY SCOPE'S DOWN!"
"MINE TOO. ALL MY ELECTRICS ARE OFFLINE!"
THAT IS BECAUSE...
I TURNED THEM *OFF*, AMERICAN.
OH, *SHOOT*--
"THE DISRUPTOR SUIT PROTOTYPE IS A SUCCESS. IT'S BREACHED EVERY ELECTRONIC FIELD FOR A HALF-MILE RADIUS.
"THIS ONE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN I DARED HOPE."

"HOW DO WE KNOW WE CAN KEEP OUR NEW...*ALLY* UNDER CONTROL? HIS HATRED OF THE UNITED STATES MAY WELL TURN AGAINST US."
"THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT. I NEED HIS SERVICES JUST LONG ENOUGH TO SERVE MY PURPOSE. HE'S A PARTNER OUT OF NECESSITY ONLY."
"BUT HE'S AN IDEALIST: A ZEALOT, A FANATIC."
"AND WHEN HE'S FINISHED HIS JOB, HE CAN GO BACK TO HIS FANATICISM IN ANY THIRD WORLD COUNTRY OF HIS CHOOSING.
"IN THE MEANTIME, IT SERVES OUR PURPOSE THAT HE BELIEVES WE'VE GIVEN HIM THE POWER HE CRAVED--AN EQUAL FOOTING AGAINST HIS OPPRESSORS."
IT'S DANGEROUS DOING BUSINESS WITH FUNDAMENTALISTS--
DON'T *ARGUE* WITH ME. HIS IDEALISM HAS LIMITS, AND I *ALWAYS* HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN.
I WOULD NEVER PRESUME TO ARGUE WITH YOU, SIR.
I'M JUST WONDERING... WHAT *KIND* OF LIMITS?
"A QUARTER BILLION OF THEM, TO BE PRECISE."

NEW AVENGERS TOWER,
JULY 4TH
I REALIZE THIS KIND OF ASSEMBLY IS UNUSUAL, EVEN FOR PEOPLE WHO SPEND THEIR DAYS IN COSTUMES PUNCHING OTHER PEOPLE IN COSTUMES.
THE AVENGERS ARE A LITTLE UNDERSTAFFED RIGHT NOW SINCE WOLVERINE AND THE SPIDER-FOLKS ARE AWAY IN CHINA. WHICH IS WHY I'VE ASKED YOU HERE.
WE'VE HAD A REQUEST DIRECTLY FROM WASHINGTON. THE PRESIDENT HAS ASKED US TO MAKE A UNIQUE PROPOSAL TO YOU.
I'M SURE MOST OF YOU KNOW COLONEL NICK FURY OF S.H.I.E.L.D. ...

POT OF GOLD!

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS...WE'VE BEEN ASKED TO MAKE A SERIES OF PERSONAL APPEARANCES AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL TO OUR TROOPS OVERSEAS.
WE'RE ONLY ASKING FOR HALF A DAY OUT OF YOUR BUSY SCHEDULES, THAT'S ALL.

NOW, I KNOW THAT NONE OF YOU ARE EXACTLY BOB HOPE, BUT IT'S THE PRESIDENT'S FEELING--
COLONEL FURY, THIS CROSSES A LINE WE CAN'T CROSS. IT'S THE NATURE OF A HERO'S JOB NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN POLITICS.

THOSE OF YOU WHO KNOW ME WELL PROBABLY THINK I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THE SPEECH.
I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU THE SPEECH. I'M GOING TO REMIND YOU OF A PERSONAL, PRIVATE OATH YOU ALL TOOK THE DAY YOU DECIDED TO BECOME HEROES.
TELEVISION REPORTERS LIKE TO SAY I FIGHT FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE AMERICAN WAY. IT MAKES FOR A NICE SOUND BITE, BUT IT'S JUST A FANCY WAY OF SAYING WHY I *REALLY* ENLISTED.
I ENLISTED TO PRESERVE THE FREEDOM I ENJOYED AT HOME, PLAIN AND SIMPLE. IT'S WHY I DECIDED TO BECOME A HERO.
HEROISM ISN'T RUNNING INTO BATTLE WITH A MACHINE GUN BLAZING AND A CIGAR IN YOUR MOUTH. TRUE HEROISM IS MOVING INTO A BATTLE ZONE THINKING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AT HOME.
HEROISM IS GOING WHERE YOU'RE *TOLD* TO GO, AS MUCH AS YOU DON'T LIKE IT.
IT'S UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE PIECES.
NO MATTER WHERE YOU'RE ASSIGNED, YOU DO IT BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE IN YOUR *HOME.*
AND THE LEAST OUR TROOPS CAN EXPECT IS THAT THEIR HOME BELIEVES IN *THEM.*
NOW RAISE YOUR HANDS IF YOU STILL--

THE TOTAL IS A QUARTER BILLION, OF WHICH YOU GET HALF. I'VE GIVEN YOU THE MONEY'S LOCATION, THE POWER TO OBTAIN IT AND THE MEANS TO FUNNEL IT INTO THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF YOUR ORGANIZATION.
WHAT YOU DO WITH IT AFTER YOU LEAVE THESE SHORES IS YOUR AFFAIR.
WHY SHOULDN'T I KEEP IT ALL FOR MYSELF? I MAKE NO GUARANTEES TO YOU, FAT MAN.
THREE MAIN REASONS: ONE, I DON'T LIKE TO DIRTY MY HANDS WHEN A BORDERLINE PSYCHOPATH LIKE YOU IS WILLING TO DO IT FOR ME; TWO, I CAN GET YOU OUT OF THE COUNTRY; THREE, THE WRIST-BAND DISRUPTOR ALSO DOUBLES AS A BOMB, AND IT'S NOW STUCK TO YOU.
YOU MIGHT BE GREEDY, BUT YOU LEAVE THE SUICIDE TO OTHERS.
YOU DISPLAY ARROGANCE TYPICAL OF YOUR KIND. YOU ASSUME OTHER MEN ARE DRIVEN BY PERSONAL DESIRE, AS YOU ARE.
BUT THE FIRE THAT DRIVES ME COMES FROM A HIGHER POWER. I AM MERELY THE MESSENGER.
I'M WILLING TO FIGHT. AND I'M WILLING TO DIE--
BUT IN THE MEANTIME, YOU'LL GLADLY SELL YOUR SOUL TO THE DEVIL.

THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE EXCHANGE SERVICE--AAFES--HAS ABOUT FORTY-EIGHT THOUSAND ASSOCIATES WORLDWIDE. AT LEAST A QUARTER OF THEM ARE MILITARY FAMILY MEMBERS.
LAST YEAR WE GENERATED AROUND A QUARTER BILLION THAT WAS PUT DIRECTLY BACK INTO MWR. I LIKE TO THINK OF IT AS OUR POT OF GOLD.
AAFES
MWR?
MORALE, WELFARE AND RECREATION. A PORTION OF THE MONEY SPENT THROUGH AAFES GOES INTO WHAT WE CALL "THE FUND."
THE MONEY IS USED TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN RECREATIONAL FACILITIES SUCH AS BOWLING ALLEYS, GYMS, LIBRARIES; AND OUR PARTNERS HELP US GIVE THE TROOPS A LITTLE TASTE OF HOME WHEREVER THE WIND SENDS THEM.
WHICH IS WHERE WE COME IN, JUST FOR TODAY.
OKAY, EVERYONE...YOU'VE ALL GOT YOUR ASSIGNMENTS. LET'S GET OUT THERE AND GO SHOW OUR TROOPS A LITTLE APPRECIATION.
ANY QUESTIONS CAN BE RELAYED THROUGH COLONEL FURY. OTHERWISE, FLY STRAIGHT AND TRUE AND MAKE SURE TO SMILE WHEN YOU GET THERE.
I SAW YOU TALKING TO THE SENTRY. I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE GUY.
HE LOOKED CONFUSED. I FIGURED HE NEEDED DIRECTIONS.
"YOU DIDN'T."
EHH...JUST A SLIGHT CHANGE OF PLANS.
I ADDED A FEW FREQUENT FLYER MILES, IS ALL.

BAGHDAD, IRAQ
...AND WE JUST WANTED YOU ALL TO KNOW HOW MUCH WE APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'RE DOING OUT HERE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU BACK SAFE AND SOUND...
WANT A COMIC BOOK?
DEPENDS. IS IT MADE OF KEVLAR?

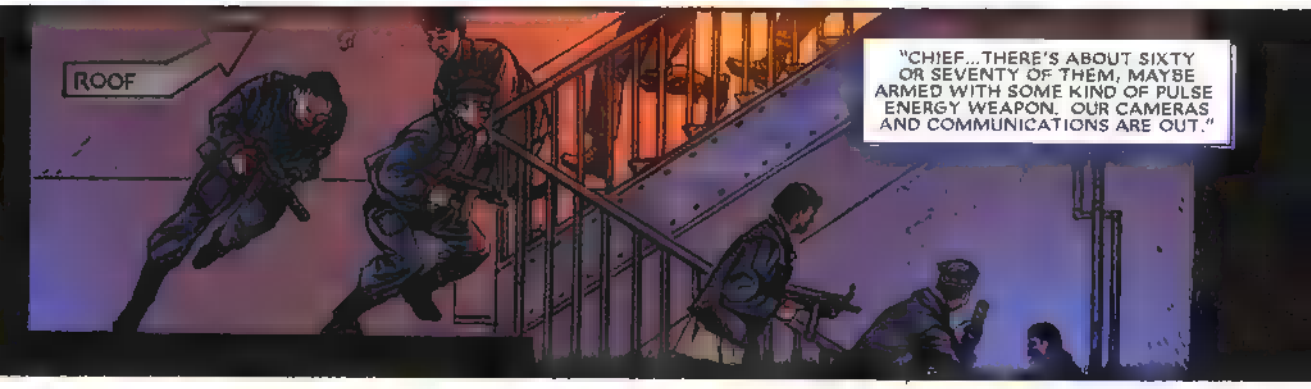
U.S.S. JOHN PAUL JONES, PERSIAN GULF
FORM A LINE, BOYS. THERE'S PLENTY OF ME TO GO AROUND.
...AND SO TWO DEMI-GODS WALK INTO A BAR IN VALHALLA... NO, WAIT...IT IS *THREE* DEMI-GODS...

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, GERMANY
HERE YOU GO, GANG. COMPLIMENTS OF AAFES AN' EVERYONE AT HOME.
HEY, DID ANYONE HEAR FROM THE SENTRY YET?

SOMEWHERE, ARIZONA
UM. I HAVE A SPECIAL DELIVERY FOR, UH...PFC CARL HOLZMANN, FIRST ARIZONA SENIOR DEFENSE REGIMENT. IS THIS SPECIAL ARTILLERY BASE #4376?
UH-HUH. PUT THE STUFF IN BACK WITH THE CHICKENS.

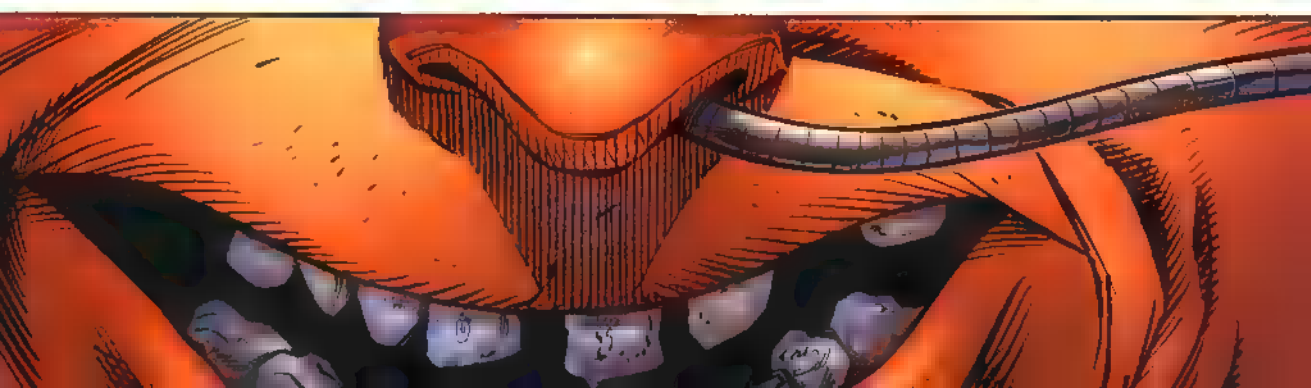
THE FAT MAN, FISK, BELIEVES THE AAFES ORGANIZATION'S MONEY IS KEPT [redacted]: A QUARTER BILLION DOLLARS. I HOPE FOR HIS SAKE HE'S RIGHT
WILSON FISK [redacted] A PROFESSIONAL CRIMINAL IN THE LAND OF CRIMINALS. HOW DO WE KNOW WE CAN TRUST HIM?
WE DON'T. NO DOUBT HE WILL TRY TO STEAL MORE THAN HIS SHARE FROM US.
BUT WE DO AS WE ALWAYS DO-- WE EXPLOIT HIS ASSETS BEFORE HE REALIZES WE'VE SEEN THROUGH HIS RIDICULOUS PLAN.
THE DISRUPTOR SUIT TECHNOLOGY WILL SERVE US IN THE GREAT SCHEME. AND IF FISK DETONATES THE BOMB, I WILL MAKE SURE I'M SITTING NEXT TO HIM WHEN IT GOES OFF.
THIS [redacted] A GREAT DAY [redacted] HISTORY: THE DAY WE CAME TO AMERICAN SHORES AND STOLE THEIR HOARDED MONEY.
I LOOK FORWARD TO THE DAY WE USE IT AGAINST THEM.

SECURITY
SIR! WE'VE GOT A SITUATION: SOMETHING'S FRITZING OUR SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS!
WE SPOTTED A MAJOR INFLUX OF BODIES COMING IN AT THE ROOFTOP LEVEL.
GET THE POLICE HERE. ROUND UP AS MANY OF OUR PEOPLE AS YOU CAN AND MEET ME AT THE ROOF.


ROOF
"CHIEF...THERE'S ABOUT SIXTY OR SEVENTY OF THEM, MAYBE ARMED WITH SOME KIND OF PULSE ENERGY WEAPON. OUR CAMERAS AND COMMUNICATIONS ARE OUT."

OKAY, JOHNSON... WE DO IT THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY. YOU FLANK THROUGH THE CAFETERIA. I'LL TAKE THE HALLWAY.

GO! GO! GO!



SPEAK.
OUR "FRIENDS" HAVE BREACHED THE BANK'S OUTER PERIMETER. ALL SECURITY FORCES ARE INCAPACITATED BUT THEY'RE ENCOUNTERING UNFORESEEN DIFFICULTIES WITH A DOUBLE LOCK SYSTEM, WHICH IS BOTH ELECTRONIC AND MANUAL.
I'M...UHH... I'M AFRAID WE'RE NOW THIRTY-EIGHT SECONDS BEHIND SCHEDULE. I TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY.
MISTER FISK, SIR...I KNOW MY APOLOGY CAN NEVER COMPENSATE FOR THE OVERSIGHT. BUT IF YOU'D BE WILLING TO SPARE MY FAMILY--
YOU WORRY TOO MUCH, ALBERT.
SIR--?
HAVEN'T YOU EVER HEARD OF A SMOKESCREEN?

SOMEWHERE OVER KENTUCKY...
IRON MAN, WE'RE GETTING A REPORT INTO AVENGERS TOWER: SOME KIND OF DISTURBANCE AT A BANK BUILDING IN MIDTOWN.
WHAT KIND OF DISTURBANCE?
WE'RE NOT SURE--ALL THE COMMUNICATIONS ARE DOWN. ELECTRICAL GRID'S OFF FOR FIVE OR SI■ BLOCKS.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE, TOO: MIDTOWN BANK HANDLES ALL OF THE FUNDS DISBURSED BY AAFES. THEY'VE GOT THEIR ENTIRE POT OF GOLD ■ THERE.
WE NEED YOU AND LUKE BACK HERE ASAP.
"WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO CONTACT THE SENTRY. NO ONE KNOWS WHERE HE IS."
OKAY... I'M HEADED THERE NOW. KEEP THE OTHER HEROES ON THEIR DELIVERY SCHEDULES.
CAN YOU GET THROUGH TO COLONEL FURY AND APPRISE HIM OF THE SITUATION?
ALREADY DONE.
OKAY...LET'S MAKE THIS AN AVENGERS-ONLY PARTY. BRING LUKE AND HERO TO MIDTOWN.
LIKE I SAID, "ALREADY DONE."

FASTER! WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG?
THE AMERICANS ARE COMING!
LET THEM COME.
YO, CAP! I HATE TO ASK THIS...BUT WHAT'S IT MEAN WHEN THE CONTROLS CATCH ON FIRE?
EJECT! EJECT!

KILL HIM!

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY, BOYS.

WHAT *HE* SAID.

WE'RE THROUGH THE FIRST LOCK! KEEP THEM BUSY--

WHAT IF WE CAN'T?

YOU WILL DIE.

CAP... LUKE... I'M APPROACHING FROM THE WEST SIDE OF THE BUILDING AND GETTING A VERY STRANGE READING UP HERE.
SOME KIND OF TRANSMISSION THAT APPEARS EVERY TIME YOUR GUY ACTIVATES HIS DISRUPTOR.
I WANT TO GO INVESTIGATE SOMETHING. WHAT'S THE SITUATION DOWN THERE?
THE SITUATION'S NORMAL, ALL F--
INVESTIGATE AWAY, IRON MAN. WE CAN HOLD THE FORT.
I'LL BE BACK AS SOON AS I CAN.
TAKE YOUR TIME.
ME AN' CAP GOT 'EM RIGHT WHERE WE *WANT* 'EM.

WE SHOULD HAVE COME WITH MORE MEN! THE AMERICANS ARE UNSTOPPABLE.
JUST A LITTLE LONGER--THE SECOND LOCK IS DOWN.
KZAKKK!
AND NOW, LET US STEAL FROM THEIR POT OF GOLD...
W-WHAT--?
T-THE VAULT IS... EMPTY.

HE LIED TO ME. THE FAT MAN LIED.
WHAT FAT MAN?
I OWE YOU NO EXPLANATION. YOU MAY HAVE DEFEATED MY BROTHERS, BUT NOW YOU FACE THE FIST OF GOD.
I POSSESS A MIGHT THAT WILL MAKE YOUR CHILDREN TREMBLE AT NIGHT.
A DISRUPTIVE FORCE THAT WILL BRING YOUR SATANIC EMPIRE TO ITS KNEES.
PREPARE FOR THE *END* OF YOUR SO-CALLED "*AMERICAN WAY!*"
WAIT! IT'S NOT...
NO, IT *ISN'T.*
THAT'S THE AMERICAN WAY, DIPSTICK.

A RATHER INGENIOUS PLAN, EVEN FOR ME.
IT ALL BOILS DOWN TO OUR FRIEND'S VERY NAIVE VIEW OF AMERICA.
HE BELIEVED THE MONEY WAS KEPT IN A VAULT BECAUSE HE'S WATCHED ONE TOO MANY SPAGHETTI WESTERNS.
ALL TRANSACTIONS ARE *ELECTRONIC* THESE DAYS.
WHILE HE AND HIS BELEAGUERED ASSOCIATES HAVE BEEN BREAKING IN, THEY'VE BEEN ACTIVATING MY *DISRUPTOR DEVICE*--
--WHICH DOUBLES AS A TWO-WAY TRANSMITTER ON A SUB-ETHEREAL LEVEL.
EVERY TIME OUR MAN SENT OUT A PULSE, I'VE BEEN HACKING THE BANK'S SYSTEM.
THE THIEVES WERE NEVER GETTING ANY MONEY--THE DISRUPTOR SUIT AND THE SWAT TEAM ASSAULT WERE A RUSE.
A FEW OF MY PEOPLE ACTED AS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TO LEAD OUR UNWITTING ACCOMPLICE INTO THINKING HE HAD POWER.
IN THE SPIRIT OF TRUE ENTERPRISE, I'VE TURNED THEIR GREED AND BLOODLUST INTO A QUARTER BILLION DOLLARS.
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL *PROGRESS!*
UNLESS SOMEONE FINDS OUT BEFORE THE TRANSACTION IS COMPLETE.
SURPRISE-- YOU'RE ON [redacted] CAMERA!

I GOT HIM, BOSS!
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
SMART MOVE.
TOO BAD THE TROUBLE WITH BEING SMART FOR A LIVING IS THAT IT'S NO FUN WHEN YOU RUN INTO SOMEONE SMARTER.
I BELIEVE THIS IS YOURS, MISTER FISK.
I FOUND IT ATTACHED TO ■ COMPUTER IN A BUILDING ADJACENT TO THE BANK.
TOOK ME A WHILE TO TRACE ITS SIGNAL BACK TO YOU.
"THE DEVICE ACTIVATED EVERY TIME YOUR FRIEND THOUGHT HE WAS POWERING UP THE SUIT YOU DESIGNED FOR HIM.
"HE'S GOING TO BE OUR GUEST FOR A WHILE, BY THE WAY."
IN THE MEANTIME, I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF REPROGRAMMING YOUR TRANSMITTER--IT'S QUITE SIMPLE WHEN YOU KNOW HOW.
FOR EVERY DOLLAR YOU THINK YOU WITHDREW FROM THE AAFES ACCOUNT, YOU ACTUALLY DEPOSITED A DOLLAR.
■ QUARTER BILLION OF THEM, TO BE EXACT.
THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION.
"HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY TO A TRUE PATRIOT."

THE DAY APPROACHES WHEN I WILL STRIKE AT THE HEART OF THE GREAT SATANIC EMPIRE.
WHEN MY PEOPLE FREE ME, I WILL BRING A RAIN OF HOLY FIRE ON YOUR FAMILIES.
DON'T YOU EVER STOP TALKING?
I AM THE VOICE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.
UPON MY RETURN, YOUR GRANDMOTHERS WILL FLEE IN TERROR. YOUR DOGS AND CATS WILL RUN COWERING INTO THE STREETS.
FINE. YOU CAN BE RIGHTEOUS HERE FOR A WHILE.
WAIT! I WAS NOT INFORMED ABOUT SHARING A CELL WITH AN AMERICAN.
THIS IS A VIOLATION OF MY RIGHTS. I WILL NOT SHARE WITH AN AMERICAN. I WILL KILL HIM FIRST.
I WON'T REACH TRIAL.
I'LL BE GONE LONG BEFORE THEN, RIDING A BLACK SPEAR OF RETRIBUTION AIMED AT YOUR MORALLY BANKRUPT COUNTRY.
YOU *TALK* TOO MUCH.
YOU'RE NOT A POLITICAL PRISONER, SON. YOU'RE A BANK ROBBER.
THIS IS WHERE YOU'LL STAY UNTIL YOU GO TO TRIAL.
KEEP UP THE BANTER, CHIEF. IT'S A FREE COUNTRY, AFTER ALL.
MAYBE YOU CAN SHARE YOUR THEORIES ON REVENGE WITH YOUR NEW PAL HERE--BUT I WOULDN'T ADVISE IT.
YOU WOULDN'T LIKE HIM WHEN HE'S ANGRY.
RIGHT, DOCTOR BANNER?

WHEN I AM FINISHED WITH YOU, MAGGOT, I WILL GO INTO YOUR HEARTLAND AND RAVAGE ITS FRUIT. I WILL SLIT YOUR MOTHER'S THROAT AS SHE SLEEPS.
LOOK AT ME WHEN I'M SPEAKING TO YOU, AMERICAN PIG!

I SAID, "LOOK AT ME!"
...

...FIVE... FOUR... THREE... TWO... ONE...

ANYBODY FEEL LIKE RESCUING A BIG-MOUTHED BANK ROBBER FROM AN ANGRY HULK?!?
THE END

CURRENT MEMBERS: Luke Cage (born Carl Lucas), Captain America (Steve Rogers), Iron Man (Tony Stark), Spider-Man (Peter Parker), Spider-Woman (Jessica Drew), Wolverine (James Howlett)
FORMER MEMBERS: Ant-Man (Scott Lang), Beast (Hank McCoy), Black Knight (Dane Whitman), Black Panther (T'Challa), Black Widow (Natalia Romanova), Captain Britain (Kelsey Leigh), Crystal (Crystalia Maximoff), Darkhawk (Chris Powell), Demolition Man (Dennis Dunphy), Doctor Druid (Anthony Ludgate Druid), Falcon (Sam Wilson), Firebird (Bonita Juarez), Firestar (Angelica Jones), Gilgamesh (a.k.a. Forgotten One), Hawkeye (Clint Barton), Hellcat (Patsy Walker), Hercules (Heracles), Hulk (Bruce Banner), Human Torch (Jim Hammond), Invisible Woman (Sue Richards), Iron Man (alternate-timeline teenage Tony Stark), Jack of Hearts (Jonathan Hart), Justice (Vance Astrovik), Living Lightning (Miguel Santos), Machine Man (X-51), Mantis (last name presumably Brandt), Mr. Fantastic (Reed Richards), Mockingbird (Bobbi Barton), Moon Knight (Marc Spector), Moondragon (Heather Douglas), Photon (Pulsar, Monica Rambeau), Quasar (Wendell Vaughn), Quicksilver (Pietro Maximoff), Rage (Elvin Halliday), Sandman (William Baker), Scarlet Witch (Wanda Maximoff), Sersi, She-Hulk (Jen Walters), Silverclaw (Lupe Santiago), Spider-Woman (Julia Carpenter), Starfox (Eros), Stingray (Walt Newell), Sub-Mariner (Namor McKenzie), Swordsman (Jacques Duquesne), Thing (Ben Grimm), Thor (son of Odin), Thunderstrike (Eric Masterson), Tigra (Greer Nelson), Triathlon (Delroy Garrett Jr.), Two-Gun Kid (Matt Hawk), USAgent (John Walker), Vision ("Victor Shade"), War Machine (Jim Rhodes), Warbird (Carol Danvers), Wasp (Janet Van Dyne), Wonder Man (Simon Williams), Yellowjacket (Hank Pym)
HONORARY MEMBERS: Aleta (Aleta Ogord), Moira Brandon, Captain Marvel (Mar-Vell), Charlie-27, Deathcry, Jocasta, Rick Jones, Magdalene, Marrina (Marrina Smallwood), Martinex (Martinex T'Naga), Masque (Whitney Frost bio-duplicate), Nikki (Nicholette Gold), Starhawk (Stakar Ogord), Swordsman (Phillip Jarvert), Vance Astro (alternate future Vance Astrovik), Whizzer (Bob Frank), Yellowjacket (Rita DeMara), Yondu (Yondu Udonta)
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Stark Tower, midtown Manhattan, formerly Avengers Mansion (a.k.a. Avengers Embassy), 890 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan, New York; a deep space monitoring station in the asteroid belt between the planets Mars and Jupiter; Avengers Headquarters, Manhattan; Avengers Compound, Palos Verdes, California; Avengers Island (a.k.a. Hydrobase); Avengers Park, Manhattan; Avengers Emergency Headquarters, somewhere outside New York City
FIRST APPEARANCE: (original team) Avengers #1 (1963); (current team) New Avengers #3 (2005)

Art by David Finch

HISTORY: They are Earth's mightiest heroes, formed to fight the foes no single hero could withstand. The Avengers are the most prestigious and powerful super-hero team in the world, an ever-shifting assemblage of super-beings, adventurers and crimefighters devoted to protecting the planet from menaces beyond the scope of conventional authorities. The group began with the random teaming of Thor, Iron Man (Tony Stark), Ant-Man (Hank Pym), Wasp and Hulk, who joined forces to thwart the Asgardian menace Loki in response to a call for help from Hulk's teen sidekick, Rick Jones. It was Pym who suggested the heroes remain together as a team, and his partner Wasp proposed they call themselves "something colorful and dramatic, like...the Avengers." The name stuck, and a legend was born.

The linchpin of the team's founders, Iron Man provided the group with financing and high-tech equipment in his dual identity as wealthy industrialist Tony Stark, donating his Manhattan residence to serve as their headquarters, Avengers Mansion. Stark's butler, Edwin Jarvis, stayed on as the mansion's principal servant and chief of staff, becoming a valued friend, confidant and advisor to the group. Stark also drew up a formal charter and by-laws to guide the team's development, establishing them as an authorized peacekeeping force within the U.S.A. and the United Nations, and began lobbying the federal government for A-1 security clearance ("Avengers Priority") status to facilitate the group's operations; however, he encountered resistance from the team's first National Security Council liaison, Special Agent James Murch. Also, the general public regarded the new team somewhat uneasily. Much of this early skepticism focused on the monstrous Hulk, who quit the team in a fit of rage shortly after its founding; but the group's image improved dramatically after they discovered, revived and recruited long-lost war hero Captain America, who became the inspirational cornerstone of the Avengers. Thanks largely to his presence, the group won its A-1 security status and rapidly became the most respected super-hero team of its generation.

The early Avengers defeated foes such as Latverian tyrant Doctor Doom; the shape-shifting Space Phantom, secretly a minion of Immortus; Namor the Sub-Mariner, later an ally; the Lava Men; Baron (Heinrich) Zemo's Masters of Evil, a super-criminal answer to the Avengers which would regroup repeatedly over the years under various leaders; the time-spanning warlord Kang the Conqueror; Kang's alternate future self, Immortus, who spent years trying to manipulate the Avengers in various subtle ways on behalf of his cosmic masters, the Time-Keepers; the Mole Man and the Red Ghost; Maggia crimelord Count Nefaria; and Wonder Man, a pawn of Zemo's Masters who befriended and betrayed the Avengers before sacrificing himself to save the heroes. During these early adventures, the quietly insecure Pym made the first of many identity changes when he became Giant-Man. Dreaming of becoming a full-fledged super hero himself, Rick Jones continued to associate with the team as an honorary member after the Hulk's departure, assisting in Avengers cases (sometimes with the aid of his Teen Brigade club); but his new mentor, Captain America, feared for Rick's safety and discouraged the team from making Jones a full Avengers member. A resentful Rick gradually drifted away from the group.

The Avengers' newfound prestige was sorely tested when the four remaining founders retired from active duty for various personal reasons, leaving "Cap" alone to lead a roster of untikely new recruits, all former criminals: the outlaw archer Hawkeye, and mutant terrorist twin siblings Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. The public was baffled, but Iron Man hoped that rehabilitating the controversial newcomers might make up for the team's early failure with the Hulk. The new roster proved him right, and "Cap's Kooky Quartet" did the founders proud. All four of them went on to long service records with the Avengers. Hawkeye in particular became a valued mainstay of the team, perhaps second only to his new mentor, Cap (though Hawkeye and Cap quarreled incessantly before developing a mutually respectful friendship). One of Hawkeye's old mentors, the roguish mercenary Swordsman (Jacques Duquesne), infiltrated the team as a double agent of the evil Mandarin; however, moved by his brief time with the group, he was actually about to betray the Mandarin when the Avengers exposed the Swordsman as a spy and forced him to flee. Shortly thereafter, Amora the Enchantress and her misguided pawn Power Man (Erik Josten) framed the Avengers for assorted crimes until the authorities ordered the Avengers to disband, though the team soon cleared their names and regrouped. Amora, Power Man and Swordsman would all battle the Avengers repeatedly over time, the latter two as frequent criminal partners.

Avengers membership proved very fluid over the years as various heroes came and went. Except for the Hulk, the founders would all return for further tours of duty, starting with Pym (in another new guise as Goliath) and the Wasp. New recruits during the team's early years included Olympian demigod Hercules, African warrior king the Black Panther, the android Vision (who became one of the team's most devoted members) and the medieval-inspired Black Knight. The team battled menaces such as the Radioactive Man, the Collector, the racist Sons of the Serpent, the Living Laser, Whirlwind, the Grim Reaper (Wonder Man's vengeful brother), the Scarlet Centurion (another incarnation of Kang), and Ultron, an insane robot created by Pym. Ultron formed a new Masters of Evil to attack the Avengers, then created the android Vision to serve him, but Vision turned on Ultron and joined the Avengers instead. Ultron became one of the Avengers' deadliest foes over the years, and Pym's feelings of guilt regarding this would accelerate the slow deterioration of his mental health. Suffering a mental breakdown (his second) during a lab accident, Pym subconsciously tried to overcome his insecurities by adopting a new identity and personality as the daring Yellowjacket, courting and finally marrying the Wasp in this guise before he fully regained his senses. Content with the outcome, Pym and Wasp agreed to let the marriage stand, and Pym kept the Yellowjacket identity for years thereafter (with occasional reversions to his Ant-Man guise). Hawkeye took over Pym's Goliath identity for a time, wanting to add more raw power to the group, but soon realized he was most uniquely effective as a marksman and resumed his Hawkeye identity.

The group made more enemies, such as criminal scientist Egghead (Pym's bitterest foe and the slayer of Hawkeye's brother Barney Barton), the cosmic gamesman known as the Grandmaster, the Squadron Sinister, astrological crime cartel Zodiac, otherdimensional warlord Arkon and the Lethal Legion (a team of vengeful Avengers foes), but they also attracted new allies such as Southwestern vigilante Red Wolf (Will Talltrees); Captain America's new partner Falcon; and the Squadron Supreme, an otherdimensional league of heroes who had unwittingly inspired the formation of the criminal Squadron Sinister. The Squadron Supreme would encounter the Avengers repeatedly as both friends and foes over the years. Alien hero Captain Mar-Vell (widely known as Captain Marvel) became one of the team's staunchest allies when they fought together in the cosmic Kree-Skrull War, during which Skrull agents tricked the Avengers into briefly disbanding. A recurring Avengers ally thereafter, Mar-Vell would come to be regarded as an unofficial Avenger. Sightless vigilante Daredevil declined Avengers membership, but his then-partner, espionage legend Black Widow (Hawkeye's ex and a longtime Avengers associate), briefly joined the team before departing. Quicksilver left

the group to marry Inhuman elemental Crystal in the hidden kingdom of Attilan and ■ restless Hawkeye left the group to try to make a name for himself outside the Avengers, though he would soon return.

With their large and varied membership, the Avengers became the central super-hero team of their generation, with ties to most other such groups. They have been particularly friendly with the Fantastic Four, sharing technology and information and often teaming up against common foes. FF founder Thing and Avengers butler Jarvis have even organized a series of floating poker games attended by various members of both teams and by other figures in the super-hero community. The Avengers have a similarly long but somewhat more uneasy relationship with the often outlaw X-Men, though this didn't stop the X-Men's Beast from joining the Avengers, and his fellow X-Men Archangel, Iceman and Dazzler have all declined Avengers membership more than once. Other longtime Avengers allies include the Defenders, a completely informal super-team whose early members were Doctor Strange, Namor, the Hulk, the Silver Surfer, the Valkyrie — and, briefly, Hawkeye. Shortly after the Defenders formed, they and the Avengers were tricked into battling each other as part of a scheme masterminded by Loki and Dormammu, but this Avengers-Defenders War ended with the villains defeated and the heroes parting as friends.

The Avengers had ■ rotating chairmanship system during their early years, with each active member taking turns serving as the chairman or overall organizational head of the group, while Cap often served as field leader. Generally acknowledged as the group's most capable commander, Cap was eventually granted retroactive founder status, replacing the long-gone Hulk as one of the team's five senior members. When the team's chairmanship was made a full-time position with full leadership powers, Captain America was appointed the first full-time chairman. Shortly thereafter, a reformed Swordsman rejoined the team alongside his enigmatic new lover Mantis, and he ultimately died protecting her from Kang. A formidable but disruptive presence in the group, Mantis was attracted to the Vision and aggressively pursued him despite his long-brewing romance with the Scarlet Witch; however, Vision and the Witch ultimately married, and Mantis left Earth to fulfill her prophesied destiny as the Celestial Madonna.

When a disillusioned Steve Rogers temporarily abandoned his Captain America guise, he appointed Thor to replace him as Avengers chairman, and the team began seeking new members to fill vacancies in the ranks. The haughty mentalist Moondragon, the intellectual animal-man Beast, the happy-go-lucky Hellcat and time-displaced Old West hero the Two-Gun Kid all joined the group during conflicts with foes such as Kang and the pawns of the Serpent Crown, though all but Beast opted for reserve status, and a departing Thor appointed Iron Man to succeed him as Avengers chairman. The group also began to attract a circle of informal allies such as the aging speedster Whizzer, the resurrected Wonder Man, the robotic Jocasta, the time-spanning 31st century Guardians of the Galaxy and Ms. Marvel (Carol Danvers), all of whom helped the team oppose the mad man-god Korvac. A 31st century criminal who had acquired cosmic power and intended to remake the universe ■ a peaceful paradise under his control, Korvac ultimately faked his death when his savage conflict with the Avengers forced him to give up on his dream of universal peace. Other notable Avengers foes of the period included the gravity-manipulating Graviton, a newly superhuman Count Nefaria, and the death-worshipping demigod Thanos.

By this time, the paranoid and combative federal agent Henry Peter Gyrich had become the team's new government liaison, the most meddlesome and hostile holder of the post to date. Threatening to revoke the team's security clearance (and occasionally suspending it), he imposed modifications of the team's membership policies, placing a seven-person cap on the active membership, recruiting African-American adventurer Falcon to fill an equal-opportunity quota (making Falcon so uncomfortable that he soon quit the active roster), relegating most of the Avengers to reserve duty (including new recruit Wonder Man), and inducting Ms. Marvel; but Gyrich was eventually reassigned, and the team worked more smoothly with subsequent liaison Raymond Sikorsky. Regardless of government interference, the team continued to thwart menaces such as the Elder God Chthon (who briefly possessed Scarlet Witch during a quest for answers regarding her and Quicksilver's origins), the Elements of Doom, the Grey Gargoyle, Taskmaster and Red Ronin, sometimes aided by allies such ■ Daredevil and Scott Lang, the new Ant-Man. Captain America resumed the chairmanship when Iron Man stepped down from the post.

The group played an unwitting role in two personal tragedies around this time. When rookie heroine Jewel (Jessica Jones) attacked the Avengers under the mental control of the Purple Man, the Avengers struck back and seriously injured her before realizing what had happened. Jones eventually recovered, but she was so traumatized that she gave up superheroics, turning down an offer to become the intelligence agency S.H.I.E.L.D.'s new Avengers liaison as an Avengers reservist. Not long after Jewel's downfall, the Avengers failed to prevent Ms. Marvel's abduction and violation by Marcus (son of Immortus), leaving Carol Danvers bitterly estranged from the team for years, though she eventually rejoined in a new guise ■ Warbird.

An impromptu membership drive staged by a meddlesome Moondragon recruited the cat-woman Tigra, whose confidence issues made her first active membership stint a short one, and brought back long-inactive Yellowjacket, who soon began to buckle under the pressure of Avengers duty, suffering his fourth and worst nervous breakdown. Becoming verbally and even physically abusive toward his wife Wasp, Pym was court-martialed for reckless conduct after he needlessly prolonged the team's battle with Ellqueen. He tried to redeem himself by programming Salvation-1, ■ robot he planned to deactivate with a secret cutoff switch, to attack the Avengers. The robot worked too well, endangering the Avengers and nearly killing Pym before Wasp deactivated it. Expelled from the Avengers in disgrace and divorced by the Wasp, a penniless Pym ■■■ soon framed for treason by his old foe Egghead and thrown in jail.

The Wasp, meanwhile, was elected Avengers chairwoman (the post having become an elected position by this time) and proved to be a surprisingly effective leader, blossoming into ■ ■■■ confident and formidable Avenger in Pym's absence. She began seeking more female Avengers, and while allies such as Dazzler and Spider-Woman (Jessica Drew) turned her down, she did manage to recruit and mentor the She-Hulk and the new Captain Marvel (Monica Rambeau). Rambeau, later known as Photon and Pulsar, would prove to be one of the team's mightiest and most respected members. Pym, meanwhile, was abducted and framed for more crimes by Egghead's Masters of Evil; but the Avengers managed to clear Pym's name, and Pym himself single-handedly defeated the Masters. Egghead died trying to shoot the victorious Pym in the back, his gun plugged by one of Hawkeye's arrows. Deciding to make a new life for himself as Hank Pym rather than in one of his various costumed guises, Pym retired from heroics. The Eternal adventurer Starfox joined the team for ■ time seeking adventure, inspired by the memory of his late friend Mar-Vell, who had died of cancer. Another spacefaring hero, the Silver Surfer, had turned down a membership offer after aiding the team against the Molecule Man.

Falling under the influence of the alien computer ISAAC, the Vision began to plot world domination and set about further expanding the Avengers in pursuit of this goal. Taking over the chairmanship from Wasp while she recovered from her near-death experience during the Secret Wars, Vision began seeking new members (though some prospects such as Black Cat and Doc Samson turned him down) and soon opened a second headquarters on the west coast, Avengers Compound, manned by Avengers veterans Hawkeye (western chairman), Wonder Man and Tigra and new recruits Mockingbird (Hawkeye's wife) and the Iron Man (Jim Rhodes), who replaced the alcoholic Tony Stark. The vigilante Shroud was also offered western Avengers membership but turned it down, not wanting to compromise his cover as a supposed criminal. There would now be two Avengers rosters active simultaneously, a western roster and an eastern roster.

The Avengers eventually freed Vision from ISAAC's influence, but not before he invaded and briefly usurped computer systems around the world. No damage was done, but the authorities began to regard the Avengers in general and Vision in particular as a potential threat, and the team's security clearances and government privileges severely curtailed. Stripped of their permission to house aircraft within city limits, the eastern Avengers (again chaired by Wasp) began housing their fleet of quinjets on the artificial island Hydrobase run by the aquatic adventurer Stingray (Walter Newell) and his wife Diane, which led to the Newells' friend Namor joining the Avengers. Meanwhile, the newly sober original Iron Man returned to action with the western roster, which also recruited members and associates such as devout Christian adventurer Firebird, the Thing (who joined briefly during an estrangement from the Fantastic Four), Doctor Pym (Hank Pym returning to action as a plainclothes adventurer) and eerie vigilante Moon Knight. An insane Quicksilver turned against the team for a time under the influence of Maximus, but eventually regained his sanity and renewed his Avengers ties.

When Baron (Helmut) Zemo's Masters of Evil invaded and occupied Avengers Mansion, the Avengers managed to retake their headquarters with the aid of allies such as Doctor Druid (who soon joined the team), Scott Lang and Shroud, handing the Masters a crippling defeat; but Jarvis was seriously injured and the Mansion was wrecked, prompting the eastern roster to rebuild their headquarters in Hydrobase, which they eventually purchased and renamed Avengers Island. By this time, an exhausted Wasp had resigned as chair and was replaced by Captain Marvel (Rambeau), whose term was cut short when the team forced to battle honorary member Marrina (Namor's wife), who had mutated into the monstrous Leviathan. In the end, Marrina was apparently slain and Rambeau suffered severe injuries that forced her off the active roster, though she would later recover and return as a reservist. Doctor Druid, who had fallen under the covert influence of Ravonna the Terminatrix, used his mental powers to take command of the team and they all served briefly as pawns of Ravonna before they turned against her, casting Ravonna and Druid into the timestream. Demoralized, the remaining eastern roster broke up.

Meanwhile, the western roster briefly split in two, largely because of an ethical conflict between Hawkeye and Mockingbird over her near-murder of the evil Phantom Rider (Lincoln Slade) during a time travel quest. For a time, Mockingbird formed her own splinter group of dissident Avengers alongside Tigra and Moon Knight, though this trio soon broke up. While Hawkeye held the remnants of his western roster together, Captain America (then known as the Captain) fought the High Evolutionary alongside a one-time squad of reservists, ex-Avengers and honorary members, including new recruit Rita DeMara, a new criminal Yellowjacket and past Avengers foe. Shortly thereafter, Cap began rebuilding the eastern roster with recruits such as Demolition Man (who went missing in action after a single mission), Thor, Invisible Woman, Mister Fantastic and Gilgamesh, most of whom served only briefly. Cap also began hiring an expanded civilian staff known as the Avengers Crew, notably Peggy Carter, Michael O'Brien, Fabian Stankowicz and John Jameson.

Troubled by the Vision's access to sensitive data during his brief world conquest attempt, Vigilance, an international conspiracy of government intelligence agencies, abducted the android and wiped his mind clean, seemingly destroying his memories and personality, reducing the Vision to an emotionless robot. This incident (inexplicably sanctioned by a previously Avengers-sympathetic Raymond Sikorsky) effectively destroyed Vision's marriage to the devastated Scarlet Witch; it also led the U.S. government to force its USAgent operative onto the western Avengers roster to supervise the team's operations, prompting Hawkeye to resign the western chairmanship in protest. For a time, Hawkeye and Mockingbird served as mentors to the Great Lakes Avengers, an unauthorized team of rookie adventurers operating out of the American Midwest, and the GLA became recurring Avengers allies (albeit not official Avengers).

Given the recent disarray in both coastal rosters, Captain America merged the operations of the two teams for a time, convincing most of the past and present members (including new recruits Firebird and cosmic hero Quasar) to be on call at either or both bases as needed, while continuing to recruit more new members such as the android Human Torch. Despite the expanding roster, Avengers Island was attacked and sunk by Doctor Doom's robot army during the Acts of Vengeance conspiracy (leading to a drastic downsizing of the Avengers Crew), and the Avengers Park memorial built on the original site of Avengers Mansion was also wrecked during this conflict. However, the complex of sub-basements from the original Avengers Mansion structure had survived, and eastern Avengers operations moved there while a new Avengers Headquarters was built on the old Mansion site. Meanwhile, on the west coast, the Scarlet Witch went criminally insane after her and Vision's magically-conceived twin sons, Tommy and Billy, destroyed in a confrontation with Mephisto and Master Pandemonium. Falling under evil influences such as her father Magneto and Immortus, Wanda attacked the Avengers repeatedly until she regained her sanity and rejoined the team. Back east, the Avengers took on several more new recruits, such as the Eternal transmutator Sersi (who served a long stint) and longtime allies Spider-Man and Stingray, neither of whom served fully active members.

Losing its U.S. government backing altogether, the Avengers reincorporated under a new United Nations charter with one active roster and one "reserve substitute" roster assigned to each coastal base, including new western reservist Machine Man and new eastern reservists Rage and Sandman (a reformed super-criminal who soon quit due to a misunderstanding). The new eastern roster, chaired by Captain America, soon added new recruits Crystal (Quicksilver's estranged wife) and a mortal incarnation of Thor (Eric Masterson), who later became Thunderstrike. The new western roster, initially co-chaired by Doctor Pym and the Wasp, fired USAgent for misconduct since the group was no longer governmentally obligated to keep him on the team; but the Agent soon rejoined alongside new recruits Spider-Woman (Julia Carpenter) and the Living Lightning after they aided the Avengers against Doctor Demonicus and the Pacific Overlords, and Iron Man soon took over as western chair. Both coastal rosters and various reservists teamed up to intervene in the Kree-Shi'ar war (a mission

sometimes referred to as Operation: Galactic Storm); but while they managed to protect Earth and save the Shi'ar empress Lilandra from assassination, they failed to prevent the Kree's Supreme Intelligence from killing much of its own interstellar empire's population with a Nega-Bomb in a supremely ruthless gambit meant to jumpstart the Kree's long-stagnant genetic evolution. When a rogue Avengers faction — including Iron Man, Black Knight, Vision, Hercules, Wonder Man, Sersi and Thor (Masterson) — tried to execute the Supreme Intelligence for its crimes, Captain America resigned the chairmanship in protest. His deputy leader Black Widow replaced him as eastern chair, with Black Knight serving as her unofficial field leader, leading the team against foes such as Proctor and his Gatherers, malicious alternate-reality counterparts of the Avengers. Two of the Gatherers, Magdalene and the new Swordsman (Philip Jarvert), would eventually defect to the Avengers, and Shi'ar warrior Deathcry unofficially joined the team during the same period. Also, during the final battle with the Gatherers, Ute the Watcher re-created the original Avengers Mansion.

On the west coast, Tony Stark faked his own death while dealing with health problems, estranging Iron Man from the Avengers after he returned from his seeming demise. Hawkeye took over as western leader again, adding Darkhawk to the team's reserves, while War Machine (ex-Iron Man Jim Rhodes) replaced Stark on the roster; but Hawkeye decided that the leadership and his newly rebuilt marriage to Mockingbird were in conflict, so he stepped down as chair and was replaced by Scarlet Witch. On the Witch's watch, Mockingbird was killed by the demon Mephisto during a supernatural conflict with old Avengers foes Satannish and Hangman (Jason Roland) and their new Lethal Legion. With Hawkeye departing to mourn his wife's death and several other members leaving for various reasons, the western roster was left short-handed at a time when Avengers Compound was heavily damaged due to recent battles. Convening a summit of the eastern and western rosters, Black Widow and Captain America led a motion to shut down the struggling western roster over the objections of its few remaining members. The motion passed and the deciding vote was cast by Iron Man, who had returned just long enough to participate in the meeting and then recruited several ex-western Avengers to join him in forming a rival west coast super-team, Force Works.

Both the Avengers and Force Works were soon rocked by the Crossing, a crisis that was later revealed to be an elaborate hoax perpetrated by Immortus (disguised as Kang) and his Space Phantoms (disguised as Mantis and others). By the end of that conflict, Madame Masque clone Masque was allied with the Avengers; Iron Man was seemingly dead, replaced by a teenage alternate-timeline counterpart; and Force Works was disbanded, though most of its members soon renewed their ties with the Avengers. Shortly after the Crossing, most of the core Avengers were lost and presumed dead in battle with the psychic monster Onslaught, though they secretly survived in the Counter-Earth alternate world created by Franklin Richards. After trying unsuccessfully to rebuild the team, Black Widow formally disbanded the Avengers, laid off the staff and closed Avengers Mansion. When the missing Avengers returned from Counter-Earth months later (complete with a resurrected Iron Man), the menace of Morgan Le Fay soon reunited most of the past Avengers members to stop Morgan, as well as drawing in new recruits Firestar and Justice, mutant veterans of the youthful New Warriors. After Morgan's defeat, the Avengers regrouped with Captain America as chair, though a restless Hawkeye soon left to mentor the Thunderbolts, a team of reformed villains (mostly former Masters of Evil). The Avengers also gained their most cooperative and friendly government liaison ever, lifelong Avengers fan Duane Freeman. Meanwhile, Rick Jones, Pym (once again Giant-Man), the Wasp and a group of Avengers taken from various past and future eras teamed up with Kang, the Supreme Intelligence and Libra to save the future of humanity from Immortus and the Time-Keepers during a time-spanning conflict known as the Destiny War.

When the Triune Understanding philosophical movement's corrupt leadership began a smear campaign portraying the Avengers as racist and religiously intolerant, the more media-savvy Wasp took over as Avengers chair, leading a revamped roster that included new recruit and Triune spokesman Triathlon, whose visible minority status and Triune ties would help defuse much of the negative publicity. Despite his Triune loyalties, Triathlon soon became a valued and dedicated Avenger, and helped bring down the Triune Understanding's corrupt leaders. During this same period, Jarvis' foreign foster daughter "Lupe" Santiago came to America as a college student and soon joined the Avengers reserves as Silverclaw. Inactive members Thor, Photon, Quasar, Tigra, Moondragon and Starfox joined forces with half-alien powerhouse Jack of Hearts to prevent the cosmic beings known as the Infinites from disastrously relocating the Milky Way galaxy. Shortly thereafter, the Avengers reorganized yet again under co-chairs Captain America and Wasp, devoting more resources to surveillance, monitoring, undercover work and investigation, striving for earlier detection and neutralization of major threats.

In addition to its active members and the reserves, the team also began fielding "detached service" members who were given assignments separate from the active roster for extended periods, such as a team assigned to man a deep-space monitoring station in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. In another corner of space, several Avengers teamed with Mantis and Haywire on a celestial quest to protect Mantis' son Quoi from

Art by Joe Quesada

Thanos, who reluctantly teamed with the Avengers in the end to neutralize the cosmic decay known as the Rot (though Thanos later tried to claim the Thanos involved in these events may have been one of his "Thanosi" clones); along the way, Mantis and Vision (who had long since regained his capacity for emotion) shared a passionate romance.

When Kang the Conqueror and the new Scarlet Centurion (Kang's son Marcus) waged an all-out war of conquest against Earth, the Avengers led Earth's defensive efforts, during which Jack of Hearts joined the team, Freeman died in Kang's assault on Washington, and Pym resumed his Yellowjacket guise after yet another identity crisis. Kang actually succeeded in conquering Earth for a time, but an Avengers-led resistance soon overthrew the Kang Dynasty and liberated the planet.

Around the same time, the Avengers teamed with a league of heroes from a divergent cosmos to save both their universes from a cosmic scholar turned semi-omnipotent destroyer. Shortly thereafter, the mysterious villain Scorpio began making the world's national capitals vanish, and the United Nations turned to the Avengers to serve as an emergency global authority and peacekeeping force. Once Scorpio was defeated and the capitals restored, a grateful United Nations granted the Avengers sovereignty comparable to that of an independent country, empowering Avengers members to act as diplomatic representatives of the super-hero community and declaring Avengers Mansion the Avengers Embassy.

Key allies during the Scorpio crisis included a humbled Gyrich, given a second chance and hired to serve as the group's new United Nations liaison, and the new Ant-Man (Scott Lang), who finally joined the team officially. Lang feuded bitterly with another recent recruit, the increasingly unstable Jack of Hearts. Their feud ended abruptly when Jack helped rescue Scott's daughter Cassie from child killer Charles Cooley, then impulsively blew himself up along with Cooley. He was replaced by a new Captain Britain (Kelsey Leigh), an English single mother who was mystically reborn as a superhuman champion after sacrificing her life to aid the Avengers in battle. Hawkeye had rejoined the team by this time, making it awkward when the Avengers opposed the Thunderbolts' energy-collecting Liberator project. In the end, the project was scrapped and the Thunderbolts broke up, but the sonic-powered Songbird — who had been acting as the Avengers' mole within the Thunderbolts — was so disillusioned by the Avengers' underhanded tactics during the whole affair that she turned down an offer of Avengers membership, later helping to build a new Thunderbolts team instead.

The original Avengers were finally destroyed by a threat from within, when the Scarlet Witch went mad and turned her reality-warping powers against the team. Hawkeye, Vision, a reanimated Jack of Hearts and Ant-Man (Lang) were all apparently slain, the Witch herself was reduced to a seemingly mindless husk, Avengers Mansion was destroyed, Tony Stark's fortune was by now too depleted to fully rebuild Avengers operations, and the remaining members were so demoralized that they disbanded; however, this was not the end. Months later, after teaming with Iron Man, Spider-Man, Luke Cage, Spider-Woman (Drew), Daredevil and Sentry to contain a mass breakout at the super-criminal prison known as the Raft, Captain America decided that fate was trying to tell him something, and that the world still needed the Avengers. Recalling how the founding Avengers had first assembled in a similarly random fashion, Cap invited his six allies to join him in rebuilding the Avengers. Most of them accepted, though Daredevil refused to join and the unstable Sentry had gone into seclusion.

Leading intelligence agency S.H.I.E.L.D. was reluctant to sanction a new Avengers team, but Captain America reminded them that his "full champion license" status with the government gives him the authority to assemble any team he requires for any given mission, so he required no approval from the authorities to reassemble the Avengers. Iron Man offered the top floors of his new Stark Tower skyscraper to serve as the team's high-tech headquarters (staffed by ever-faithful Jarvis), and the group resolved to recapture the forty-odd Raft escapees — starting with Sauron, the prisoner whose liberation by Electro had touched off the jailbreak. Capturing Electro and tracking Sauron to the Savage Land, the new Avengers teamed with Wolverine to oppose an illegal Antarctic Vibranium (anti-metal) mining operation run by Sauron's Savage Land Mutates and an apparently rogue S.H.I.E.L.D. faction.

In the end, a retaliatory strike by the mainstream S.H.I.E.L.D. organization wiped out the entire mining operation except for a recaptured Sauron, conveniently eliminating almost all evidence and witnesses apart from the Avengers. Shaken by this, and by their discovery along the way that the Raft had been stockpiling supposedly deceased super-criminals held in reserve for unknown purposes, the new Avengers have secretly dedicated themselves to rooting out the institutional corruption behind these events; and they have recruited Wolverine, whose espionage background and ruthless attitude are seen as assets for this mission.

AVENGERS ROSTER: RECENT RECRUITS

LUKE CAGE

(born Carl Lucas)
Joined New Avengers #3 (2005)

SPIDER-MAN

(Peter Parker)
Joined in Avengers #329 (1991); resigned prior to Peter Parker, Spider-Man #11 (1999); rejoined in New Avengers #3 (2005)

SPIDER-WOMAN

(Jessica Drew)
Joined New Avengers #3 (2005)

WOLVERINE

(James Howlett, a.k.a. Logan)
Joined New Avengers #6 (2005)

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